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ABSTRACT

School-age children between the ages of 5 and 14 spend up to 80% of their time out of school. These hours represent an opportunity to help children grow and acquire important social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills and to help them develop lifelong interests. This time can also be used to provide support for the academic challenges faced by children each day in school. Out-of-school time programs provide opportunities for young adolescents to learn skills that are not usually acquired in school, such as athletic and artistic performance skills. Programs may also extend and enrich academic skills by enabling participation in a debate club or computer club. This Digest examines two broad categories of enrichment programs--extracurricular and academic enrichment--and describes specific programs, such as the Art Moves Us program in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and LA's BEST in Los Angeles, California. The Digest also discusses program funding opportunities and gives examples of specific programs such as the MOST Initiative in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle. (LPP)

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Enriching Children's Out-of-School Time

Lillian Coltin

School-age children between the ages of 5 and 14 spend up to 80% of their time out of school. These hours represent an opportunity to help children grow and acquire important social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills and to help them develop lifelong interests. This time can also be used to provide support for the academic challenges faced by children each day in school.

What Is an Enrichment Program?

The National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) Quality Standards (Roman, 1998) describe the best practices in out-of-school time programs. The NSACA standards specify that "children [should] have a chance to join enrichment activities that can promote basic skills and higher-level thinking." Examples of enrichment activities include group work on science projects, math games, and the study of plants and animals, and opportunities to create a newspaper, write a play, tackle homework, use computers, or participate in special interest groups or clubs. High-quality programs also provide time and space for children to become involved in long-term projects and productions (Roman, 1998).

This Digest examines two broad categories of enrichment programs—extracurricular and academic enrichment—and discusses program funding opportunities.

Extracurricular Activities

The theory of multiple intelligences developed by Gardner (1993) broadens our view of how humans learn and realize their potential. Classroom instruction focuses chiefly on logical/mathematical intelligences. By tapping into the underutilized intelligences, such as musical intelligence, extracurricular activities can encourage the development of skills and interests not fully nurtured during the school day. Extracurricular activities appear to provide leadership and social skills development. These skills have been shown to lead to greater self-esteem and higher aspirations in both current academic situations and in the pursuit of long-term careers (Carns et al., 1995).

While lessons and extracurricular classes have always been a part of the lives of affluent suburban children, more attention is now focused on the importance of "enrichment" programming in the lives of all children (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

Provision of extracurricular activities varies. After-school programs may offer "extra" one-day-a-week clubs that encourage children to pursue a special interest such as photography, chess, or hands-on math and science projects. These activities may be provided by regular program staff, volunteers, or invited "experts" from community museums, art centers, or music schools.

For example, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the Art Moves Us program uses the talents of more than 750 local youth, ages 7–23, to research, design, plan, and render public murals. By contributing to a collaborative team of other youth and adult artists, young people learn about the techniques of working in a particular medium and transforming ideas about life in their community to images that are displayed on public transportation and city vehicles (Heath & Roach, 1998). The Virtual Y, a collaboration of the YMCA, schools, and the PTA, has brought the Y's traditional curriculum to New York City schools. Grounded in literacy-building activities, children also use the gym and other facilities within the school building (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

These creative partnerships between after-school programs, schools, and community organizations are increasing the availability of extracurricular activities for all school-age children.

Another way to challenge children and youth after school is to deepen their learning about themselves, their community, and the world beyond. Mentoring and service learning can provide youth with the opportunity to explore a variety of work environments. In addition, students who have not performed well academically in school may find an area in which they feel competent (Miller, 1998). Citizens Schools, a not-for-profit corporation, successfully combines both mentoring and service. Through its Apprenticeship Curriculum, children work directly with Boston's best performers, artisans, and tradespeople. These mentors help youth to develop high-quality, useful products or inspirational performances that are a service to their community (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

Academic Enrichment Programs

Increasingly, parents want after-school programs to provide homework help. O'Connor and McGuire (1998) caution, however, that a balance between remedial tasks and informal learning is needed to motivate and challenge children. After a full school day, children need time to blow off steam, have snacks, play with friends, and build consistent relationships with caring and competent adults. These hours provide not only a time to address the day-to-day needs of completing homework and practicing academic skills, but also an opportunity to develop talents and hobbies to enrich children's lives over the long term.

LA's BEST—"Better Educated Students for Tomorrow"—takes the mandate of "balance" seriously. While the overall program goal is to increase educational achievement for 5,000 children in the Los Angeles Unified School District, many enrichment activities, involving computers, music,

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science fairs, camping, video productions, and field trips, are offered. A 1995 study by the UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation found that children participating in LA's BEST showed more improvement in grades than children in a control group (Brooks, Mojia, & Land, 1995).

At a time when basic skills development, calls for academic excellence, and standardized testing are increasingly in the forefront of school reform, academic enrichment programs are increasing in number. Voyager, Sylvan Learning System's Mindsurfing USA, and EXPLORE are for-profit companies providing school districts with prepackaged, school-led or teacher-led curricula that can extend the school day for up to 3 hours. The military, the largest provider of out-of-school time programs, has also established homework centers as part of the mentoring, intervention, and support services provided to children and youth during parental work hours. The training of program staff and volunteers to implement these academic programs is key for their success. The BELL Foundation, which provides tutoring for low-income children, requires tutors to attend a 2-day orientation plus monthly training workshops (O'Connor & McGuire, 1998).

Funding

Enrichment programs are usually fee based and most accessible to middle- and upper-income families. The MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) Initiative, however, has demonstrated that community collaboration can increase options to extend out-of-school time opportunities to all children. The cities of Boston, Chicago, and Seattle have developed innovative funding strategies to support enrichment programs (Halpern, Spielberger, & Robb, 1998). For example, the Boston 2:00-to-6:00 Initiative supported new programs located in the public schools, leveraged over $3 million from public and private sources to help expand the number of children served, and worked with the Private Industry Council to create over 600 after-school jobs for high school students.

Tucson's Art WORKS, a summer job training program for at-risk teens, illustrates how the budgets of various public agencies may be redirected to support an arts program. A recent Art WORKS project aimed at improving public housing neighborhoods paid youth to design, construct, and install 100 mosaics on the exterior of a 34-unit apartment building, permanently replacing the graffiti that plagued the complex. The following funding streams support this program: Tucson Transportation Department, Community Development Block Grant, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Housing Rehabilitation Funds, Drug Prevention Funds, City of Tucson golf tax, School Title I funding and construction budgets, Pima County Parks and Recreation, Highway User Revenue Fund, and private corporations and foundations.

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, funded through the U.S. Department of Education, enables schools to stay open longer; offers safe havens for children; and provides intensive tutoring in basic skills, drug and violence prevention, and counseling. The program also provides opportunities to participate in supervised recreation; chorus, band, and the arts; technology education; and programs and services for children and youth with disabilities. A private partnership through the MOTT Foundation supports and trains the staff of these programs (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

Conclusion

Out-of-school time programs provide opportunities for young adolescents to learn skills that are not usually acquired in school, such as athletic and artistic performance skills. Programs may also extend and enrich academic skills by enabling participation in a debate club or computer club. In some cases, these experiences lead to lifelong interests or careers. But perhaps more importantly, the sense of competence and affiliation that can flourish during out-of-school time provides the best reason for enrichment programs (Miller, 1998).

For More Information

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